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THE ADVOCATE OF PEACE.

VOL. LX.

BOSTON, APRIL, 1898.

No. 4.

THE AMERICAN PEACE SOCIETY,
PUBLISHERS,
NO. 3 SOMERSET STREET, BOSTON, MASS.

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The Purpose of the Peace Societies.

“What is the Peace Society doing to prevent war?” This question has been frequently asked us during the recent weeks of excitement. The question indicates a wrong or very imperfect conception of the nature of the work of the peace societies. It seems to be supposed by some that an organization like the American Peace Society is good for nothing if it cannot prevent any war that threatens. Such a society ought to be able, it is imagined, at a moment of sudden excitement and danger of hostilities, to set at once in motion a mechanism powerful enough to calm the inflamed minds of the people, to stop the sensational press reporters from lying, to arrest the pens of belligerent editors, to close the mouths of fiery jingoes, to dictate the judgment of the administration, and to direct the whole course of diplomacy between two governments; in fact, to control two peoples and two governments.

The Peace Society would be delighted to do all this, if it could, but it ought not to be expected to

perform prodigies. It is only a little, comparatively, that any group of persons, unless it be large and distributed over a wide area, can do to control public sentiment when it is at fever heat, or to check the mischievous activity of a lot of irresponsible scare-heads who are always busiest at such times. As to controlling diplomacy at these junctures, but little can be done. Its secrets are not disclosed to the public, and memorializing government with declarations of general principles when delicate and disturbing questions are perplexing the minds of those in authority, is about as near useless as any good thing can be. It is often a positive injury.

We are only stating what a peace society cannot accomplish, and ought not to be expected to accomplish, under such circumstances. We do not underestimate, in the least, the positive influence which it ought to exert, and actually does exert, in the most troublous times. It goes without saying that such a society ought at such periods of disturbance, as at all other times, to put forth its utmost efforts, in all wise ways, in behalf of the principles and policies for which it stands. It should utter its voice all the louder because of the general din. Every one of its members constitutes a center of influence in his locality. By his example, his conversation, his articles in the local press, etc., he exercises a considerable restraining influence. The joint influence of all the members, scattered throughout the nation, is very strong. The peace societies, while not claiming perfection, have not been found wanting at times when the people have been carried away by passion, and war has seemed imminent. They have contributed much of that restraining force, which has often, in spite of the gusts of wild and irrational feeling, held the nation fast to her moorings and kept her from plunging recklessly into the mad orgies of war.

But the chief work of the peace societies is not

done during times of excitement, such as we have just passed through. A society which did nothing except on such occasions, and then rushed about in a paroxysm of effort, would be unworthy of the name of peace society. The purpose of such societies is not so much to try to prevent war in specific cases, however efficient they may then be, as to bring about such a change in public sentiment in reference to the whole subject of war and the methods of administering international justice as will ultimately render all war impossible. This is the great field of their service,—to promote better international feeling in a large general way; to inculcate the idea that war is a barbarous and irrational means of trying to secure justice; to induce governments to settle by arbitration all cases of dispute as they arise; to promote the negotiation of permanent treaties of arbitration between nations; and to try to secure the ultimate establishment of a permanent international tribunal to which all cases of international difference, not adjustable by diplomacy, may go as a matter of course.

It is evident that but little of this work can be done when the public mind is in a state of frenzy and suspense. It requires the patient labor of months and years, when men's minds are free from passion and open to truth. It is but slowly at best that the bad instincts and habits of thought and belief inherited from the past and strengthened by false education can be changed.

The American Peace Society, with others, has great reason to rejoice that its effects have had already such large fruitage. The change of view with regard to war and the possibility of its abolition, since the Society was founded just *seventy* years ago (*eighty-three* years ago if the life of its immediate predecessors be included), has been enormous. During these years, in dark days and bright, the Society has faithfully worked away at its problem. It has circulated many millions of pages of literature discussing all phases of the subject, seeking to turn public opinion into better channels. Many of the most eminent men in the nation have coöperated with it, speaking for it and writing for it. It has gone to the government authorities year after year with its appeals for the settlement of disputes with other nations by peaceful means, for the negotiation of permanent treaties to this end, etc. It has seen its proposed methods adopted in many

cases of dispute. It has seen a great change in public opinion. It has been joined in its propaganda by other societies (now over 400), in all the civilized nations. It has seen many great and small organizations, not specifically devoted to peace, making the subject a part of their program. During the present excitement and intensity of feeling over the destruction of the battleship Maine, and over the general Cuban question, it has seen a strong conservative feeling, both at Washington and throughout the nation, opposing the cheap and vulgar jingo ravings and the lying abominations of the sensational papers, and holding back the country from plunging rashly into war.

The Society can justly claim that through its faithful work in the past it has been one of the chief instrumentalities in producing this large conservative, restraining sentiment throughout the nation. Whatever may be the outcome of the present crisis, the Society will go steadily on, in season out of season, propagating its principles and declaring its policies. Its members have an unfaltering faith in their ultimate and not very remote success. The great movement for permanent international peace, the idea of which has in recent years so deeply taken hold of men's minds, will be little retarded by any war that may come. It has gone steadily on increasing yearly in momentum in spite of the wars which have made the pages of this century so bloody. The Society proposes, with the help of God, to continue its efforts until the movement is consummated in the setting up of a great international court and the banishing of war from human society. It asks the immediate and continued coöperation and support of all the men and women throughout the nation who share its aspirations and its hopes.

The Crime of the Sensational Journals.

A decent, self-respecting man can hardly allow himself to speak, or even to think, of the course pursued by many of the newspapers of the country during the past six weeks. The temptation to think bitter thoughts and to speak over-hard words about them, in the name of righteousness, is so great that about the only safe thing to do is to bite one's lips and keep still. However, their crime has been too great to be passed over in silence.

We have never had before in the history of the country such an exhibition of rumor-mongering as